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ABSTRACT

Black teenage girls have more than half the babies born to single teenagers, and as they are more frequently poor as well, they are more susceptible to the negative effects early childbearing has on future schooling and jobs. Studies show that teenage mothers are far less likely to complete high school or enter the work force than other teenagers. Educational opportunities available to Blacks that enhance their appreciation of school and encourage them to enter the work force are found to be important factors in reducing early childbearing. These include preschool programs (shown to reduce later pregnancy and dropout rates which are important factors in early pregnancies); desegregation programs (studies show that the females in desegregated school programs are less likely to have a child before the age of 18); and high educational aspirations, specifically the desire to have a college degree (a study shows that these teenagers are 85% less likely to get pregnant). In order to reduce the incidence and negative effects of teenage pregnancy, the following strategies should be employed: (1) a curriculum leading to further schooling and/or jobs should be offered; (2) concrete information on the realities and responsibilities of parenting should be made available to teenagers; (3) parents of teenagers should be involved in programs before as well as after pregnancy has brought on a crisis; and (4) the involvement of teenage fathers should be fostered. (CG)

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Pregnant and Parenting Black Teenagers: Some Educational Preventors. Paper presented before the National Black Child Development Institute, Fifteenth Annual Conference, October 16-18, 1985; Capital Hill Hotel, Washington, D.C.

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I will start this afternoon with a few facts about pregnant and parenting teenagers. Although many of you may know these facts, it is probably not a bad idea to set the stage with what we are really talking about. I should say also, having come as a research associate for the Eric Clearinghouse on Urban Education, that the Clearinghouse collects information on a great variety of topics connected to urban and minority education, and that recently we have found it increasingly imperative to monitor the new information coming in on both research about pregnant and parenting teenagers and evaluations of both in and out of school programs to aid them. In fact, if any of you in the audience have material which might be of interest to others in the field, I would very much welcome receiving copies to take back with me.

I should also make clear at the outset that, though I am aware of the moral arguments surrounding pregnancy in general, teenage pregnancy, in particular, and black teenage pregnancy as a very specific and complicated case, the research makes it clear to me that both the teenagers and their babies are put in jeopardy by early childbearing. The problems for the adolescents' babies are both immediate and more long term: poor medical outcomes during pregnancy and delivery, higher mortality rates during the first year, poorer health as children, and even, apparently, a greater possibility of child abuse (Mecklenburg and Thompson, 1983) and poorer academic achievement (Moore et al., 1985). For the teenage parents themselves, lowered educational attainment and income are two severe consequences. According to one study, 28-year-old women who give birth before age 18 are only half as likely to have graduated from high school as are those who postponed childbearing until after they turned twenty (cited in Guttmacher, 1981). For young fathers, the effects of teenage parenting are less dramatic, though substantial: those who become fathers before age 18 are two-fifths less likely to graduate from high school than those who wait. In the area of employment, 24-year-old women who give birth as teenagers have only half as much income as women who give birth in their twenties.

As most of you know, the United States currently has the highest rate of pregnancy among teenagers of any Western industrialized nation. Each year, we can expect one teenage girl in ten to become pregnant, and four girls out of ten who are now fifteen years old will get pregnant some time during their teens (Mecklenburg and Thompson, 1983). About ninety percent of all teenage mothers keep their babies, although this percentage

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varies greatly by the area of the country and the race of the teenager.

The influence of race or ethnicity on sexual activity, contraceptive use, and the ways in which pregnancies are resolved is still unclear, since studies rarely separate out the effects of social class from those of race or ethnicity. Still, current research indicates that, though racial differences are diminishing, they are still marked (McGee, 1982). During the 1970s, sexual activity among urban white adolescent girls doubled, while sexual activity among black adolescent girls only rose slightly and soon leveled off. Still, by 1979, 65 percent of all black teenage girls were sexually experienced, compared with 42 percent of all white teenage girls, and among those having sex, black teenage girls tended to become sexually active a year earlier (at age 15 1/2) than whites. Although black young women living in cities had higher levels of sexual activity than those living in suburban areas, among whites there was no systematic difference in sexual activity by place of residence (Zelnik and Kanter, 1980).

Contraception usage rose rapidly in the 1970s. However, the fact that 80 percent of all teenage pregnancies remain "unintended" is related to a similar high proportion (two-thirds) of sexually active teenagers who still either never practice contraception or use a method inconsistently (Guttmacher, 1981). Half of all first premarital pregnancies among teenagers occur within the first six months after the initiation of sexual intercourse, and a fifth occur within the first month--a period when girls are less likely to admit that they are sexually active and so to prepare themselves (Guttmacher, 1981; Zabin et al, 1981). In fact, teenagers do not appear to seek birth control advice until nine months after they've started having sex (McGee, 1982).

Studies of racial differences in contraceptive usage are few, and even the best do not isolate social class. However, proportionately more black teenagers than white teenagers receive family planning services--which is not surprising, since more black teenagers than white teenagers are sexually active. While a higher proportion of blacks are served by organized family planning clinics, a higher proportion of whites are served by private physicians--which seems to be a class phenomenon. At every age, blacks are disproportionately likely to resort to abortion compared to whites. In 1978, black teenagers obtained nearly 30 percent of all abortions--or 110,000 abortions out of a national total of 419,000--and had an abortion rate of more than double that of white women (Guttmacher, 1981). However, black women are substantially more likely than white women to experience unintended pregnancies and even their higher abortion rate is insufficient to erase the difference in birth rate due to their much higher incidence of unwanted pregnancies.

Separating out-of-wedlock births by race indicates that the

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increase in the out-of-wedlock birthrate in the 1970s was confined to white teenagers--especially those ages 15-17, while the black teenage out-of-wedlock birthrate declined (Guttmacher, 1981). Still, among unmarried 18-19 year olds, the black birthrate is five times the white birthrate, and among those 17 and younger, the rate is about eight times higher. Black girls, of whom there are far fewer than white girls, have more than half the babies born to single teenagers. In 1981, there were roughtly 132,000 babies born to black adolescents, compared to 131,000 babies born to white adolescents (Hulbert, 1984). Of those teenagers giving birth out-of-wedlock, only 4 percent enter an adoption plan or arrange for their babies to be cared for by relatives or friends (Title XX, 1981). Virtually all black teenage mothers appear to keep their babies at home, most often in their own mothers' households, while 90 percent of all white girls keep their babies, 7 percent giving them up for adoption and another 3 percent giving them to relatives or friends (Guttmacher, 1981).

Since poverty is unfortunately a more frequent plague among blacks than among whites, racial differences in the incidence of teenage parenting imply economic differences as well. Although there is no national data on this, it is clear that a very high proportion of unintended childbearing occurs to teenagers from economically and socially deprived homes--many from homes headed by single women. In one sample, 54 percent of the 24-yer-old women who had given birth at or before age 17 were low income, compared to 33 percent of those who had given birth between 21 and 23, and 15 percent of those who were still childless (Children's Defense Fund, 1984b).

Dropping out of school and being unemployed, both of which take their tool on the poor and on minorities, appear to increase the risk of teenage pregnancy and parenting. Teens who drop out of school are more likely to become pregnant. And teenagers who have a baby are more likely to drop out of high school than those who don't (Moore et al., 1984). As for those students who drop out of school to have their babies, 85 percent never return (Dunkle, 1984).

Clearly the attractions of motherhood are inversely proportionate to the possibilities a girl believes she can look forward to either through education or in the world of work. Not surprisingly, teenagers'expectations for mothering also tend to be somewhat unrealistic. Pregnant teenagers appear to expect significantly more from the birth fathers in financial support, in physical care, in attachment, than the boys are willing to give. And though their own mothers generally contribute enormously to child care, even here the teenagers' expectations are beyond what occurs, and so motherhood is a far more solitary responsibilities than the girls anticipate (Michaels, and Brown, 1983).

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Programs and Practices

When I first began to look for programs for pregnant and parenting teenagers, I thought very specifically and immediately in terms of school-based programs that might enable these teenagers to stay in school, to pursue their education, perhaps to have help in making a choice about childbearing, and to receive assistance (both knowledge and concrete aid) with childrearing. Career-directed programs and job-referral services were also, of course, obvious solutions to making childbearing a less attractive option. I shall describe several of such programs in a few moments, but first I want to share with you some information that may at first sight appear less directly involved, but which certainly points to lines of involvement for school districts and directions for policy.

There is a very thorough and long-term study (Berrueta-Clement, et al., 1984) of several groups of black students who attended preschool in the late 1960s and early 1970s, as well as their matched controls. These preschool programs were started around the time when Head Start began and were part of the hope for preschool as an intervention to solve a great variety of educational and social problems. By now, there is a lot of research to support the effectiveness of Head Start and other such preschool programs on children's school performance. However, what the study I am talking about suggests is that, through setting in motion a different set of behaviors and expectations, preschool can have much more long-term and wide-ranging effects than all but the most enthusiastic might have predicted. Not only do preschool graduates perform better intellectually and show up less frequently in special education classes, but they tend to drop out of school less frequently. (This is important for what we are talking about, since being a teenage dropout increases the likelihood of being a pregnant teenager.) Moreover, the black, low income graduates of a preschool that has been most thoroughly studied, a rather good one, in Ypsilanti, Michigan, called the Perry Preschool, were found to have lower delinquency and teenage pregnancy rates than their peers who had not gone to preschool. Moreover, they were more likely to be employed the year after high school than were their nonpreschool peers. So what we have here is a one- or two-year experience, starting at age 3 or 4, clearly influencing the way these students think about school and perform in their school work, as well as some heightened sense of themselves and their possibilities that is making them avoid both delinquency and pregnancy.

A second piece of research that can give us a clue about how we might lower the incidence of teenage pregnancy is a large study done by the Center for Social Organization of Schools at Johns Hopkins University and the Rand Corporation. It's a study of over 600 black pupils who were in Project Concern, an experiment begun in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1966. About half the students were sent to predominantly white schools in the Hartford suburbs, while the other half remained in the

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predominantly black city schools. In the Hartford study, whatever the reasons for a variety of good results, (and the "desegregated" environment was not always a completely friendly one), it is clear that going to a predominantly white, desegregated school had a number of interesting effects on black students in both academic and social areas. In addition to feeling more at ease in predominantly white settings, and so attending white colleges more often and working more frequently in predominantly white settings, these desegregated black students were more likely to graduate from high school; they were involved in fewer incidents with the police and got into fewer fights as adults; and the women in the group were less likely to have a child before they were 18 years old.

There is a second, related study that focuses on the effects of desegregation on black teenage sexuality. Still in progress, the study uses the National Survey of Children as its data source. Controling for socioeconomic class and education, the authors have found an extremely strong association among 15-year-old black students between having sexual intercourse and attending a segregated (over 90 percent black) school. Black students in segregated schools were 5-6 times as likely as black students in desegregated schools to have had sex (Furstenburg, et al., in progress).

Perhaps what both the Head Start study and the types of desegregation research point to, in terms of teenage pregnancy, are the benefits of raised aspirations. Another study, this time directed specifically to the issue of teenage pregnancy, found that high educational aspirations, particularly if they are acted upon in terms of chosen coursework, are an important aspect of pregnancy prevention among black teenagers. In Chicago, a group of black teenagers studied were 53 percent less likely to have had sex if they desired a college degree than if they did not. Moreover, black teens with similar family background and neighborhood characteristics who lacked college aspirations were 85 percent more likely to become pregnant than their peers (Hogan and Kitagawa, 1983). Being in a college preparatory curriculum appears to be significantly and negatively related to the age of first childbirth, and the effect of being in a college preparatory track is somewhat stronger for blacks than for whites (Moore and Hoffreth, 1980).

These three studies thus point to general educational changes--preschool programs, desegregation, an academic college-bound curriculum--that might reduce teenage pregnancy and parenting merely through giving students a better sense of their life chances. Counselors need to understand the salience of a college-bound curriculum when steering a black teenage girl either into or away from a college-bound course of study. School administrators and other educational planners need to understand that social consequences such as teenage pregnancy and parenting are also at stake when they either fund, or cut funding from preschool programs, and when they support or work against desegregaiton.

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Several studies of job-training programs also show the effectiveness of education that clearly leads to employment in reducing pregnancy and childbirth. In a follow-up study of Job Corps participants 18 months after leaving the program, Job Corps participation reduced the number of births by 14 percent, and lowered the illegitimacy rates by 4 percent for all women participants relative to the control group (Mallar, et al., 1980). Similarly, an experimental program designed to test the effects of replacing the current welfare system with a combination of negative income tax and various manpower offerings resulted in a 31 percent reduction in fertility during the second and third years of the program among single black women assigned to the manpower counseling treatment, while the program offering a half-subsidy of training/education costs appears to have reduced single black women's fertility by 49 percent below that of controls (Groenevald, 1980). Though there has been more recent criticism of these programs for failing to have longer-term effects, the criticism should really be aimed at the lack of sustained employment, which is pretty clearly the critical factor in either giving a woman a sense of a career other than mothering, or in making her believe that choosing early childbirth is her most hopeful option.

Because many students drop out of school either before, or quite early in, their pregnancy, schools typically complain that the teenagers who need their services the most fall through the cracks. This is clearly a very crucial problem with Hispanic girls, where 40 percent of all dropouts leave school before grade 10, and so thousands of pregnant Hispanic girls are not even available for the existing high-school based programs.

The passage of Title IX accomplished two major goals: it gave pregnant and parenting teenagers the right to remain in school, regardless of whether they were married, and it made their situation a school concern. In fact, however, both the federal government and most states have been reluctant to pursue a vigorous policy regarding school-aged pregnant and parenting adolescents. Although many local school districts also remain unclear about what responses may be needed, expected, or tolerated (Zellman, 1981a), and a number of school systems actually have restrictive policies that aggrevate the problems of pregnant and parenting teens (Zellman, 1981b), schools are generally the setting in which initiative is taken. Of the approximately 25,000 public high schools in this country, over a third now have sex education courses, and one in ten offer alternative options to schooling, including evening classes and learning centers, for pregnant and parenting adolescents. The hundreds of school-based programs around the country offer counseling, social services, educational classes (including academic preparation for a high school diploma or GED, child development, family health, vocational education and life skills training); and a small but significant number offer the very important service of on-premise child care (McGee, 1982). Certainly all these services need to be continued, with more thought and planning, so that as a nation we don't lose so much

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human potential to early childbearing.

I shall close by suggesting a number of issues brought up by the research on pregnant and parenting teenagers.

First, it is pretty clear that the attraction of early parenting is inversely proportionate to the possibility of other options, particularly schooling and work. Teenagers who drop out are more likely to become pregnant than those who remain in school, and pregnant adolescents who remain in school or return after delivery are less likely to become pregnant a second time. Thus a first step toward pregnancy prevention is, in fact, dropout prevention. One of the important strategies for accomplishing this is offering a respectable, dignified curriculum that leads to work and/or further schooling. A second is giving students the belief that they can succeed in this curriculum and that they are not fools for setting their aspirations high. Finally, unemployment, particularly youth unemployment, needs to be lowered, and jobs must be available for out-of-school youth.

Second, teenagers have unrealistic fantasies about what having a child will imply. Long before they become pregnant, they must be given concrete information on the endlessly varied and longterm responsibilities of mothering. They must be helped to gauge realistically their own capacities for taking on these responsibilities and to judge equally realistically where and from whom other help will be coming.

Third, because teenagers' own parents--particularly mothers--are obviously so important to pregnancy resolution decisions, as well as to the welfare of the teenager and her child, programs must be created specifically to draw in the mothers and fathers of the teenagers--before as well as after pregnancy has brought on a crisis.

Fourth, though I have not talked much about teenage fathers, for their sakes as well as that of the baby's, programs need to foster the father's involvement, rather than to send the young men out into hiding, as current welfare policy and even many school policies tend to do, and to enhance their capacity for immediate and long-term caring.

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